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Guru Nanak Dev Mission Series 412

Manas ki Jaat Sabai Ekai Pahchanbo

NANKANA SAHIB

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1932 to 1947

Guru Nanak Dev Mission Patiala

P. O. Sanaur, Patiala
Punjab India

Rs. 1-50

Nankana Sahib

Narain Singh Ex Manager

1932 to 1947 of Nankana Sahib

Nankana Sahib is a small Town, a sub divisional head quarter of the district Shekhupura of west Punjab in Pakistan. Before partition of the Indian sub continent in 1947 it formed a part of India. Situated about eighty kilometres to the west of Lahore and thirty kilometres from the river Ravi, to its north, it lies in most fertile verdant plains of the Punjab.

The existence of a huge mound popularly known as Dhaular (royal palace) spread over approximately half a million square yards at less than half a kilometer from the town of Nankana Sahib with traces of ancient habitation over there and at its foot to its north a very old drinking water well called Sitawala with deep drawn out stairs

built in heavy lime masonry leading to its spring level to provide cold spring water bath to the inmates of the palace, bear testimony to the antiquity of the place and its having been a territory of some Hindu king one of whose princesses was Sita, whose name the well bears to this day. General rise of the spring level in these areas has hidden the stairs now. Another equally old well to the east of the mound, entered as Bala wala well in the revenue records of the place appears to have derived its name from one Bala, a contemporary of Guru Nanak.

Any further excavation of the mound to trace its past history has not been possible so far, as almost the entire mound is covered with Muslim tombs and they would consider it a saerilege, to dig up the graves.

It is believed that during pre-historic times, when Kurus and Pandvas fought the battle of Kurukshetra, one Raja Varat of Multan had set up an habitation of the name of Kotli at this place. The said mound with the two wells at its foot seem to be the remnants of Kotli.

The earliest available historical reference

to the place falls about the 15th century. when the Lodhi Pathans held sway over northern India. This place was then called Rai Bhoë Ki Talwandi and was held by one Rai Bular of Bhaticlan a descendant of Ria Bhoë from whom it had derived its name. One of the tombs on mound is alleged to be that of Rai Bular, which bears out the existence of a grave-yard over there as early as the fifteenth century.

One Kalyan Dass popularly known as Kalu lived then in Talwandi. He owned some landed property over there and also held charge of the land records of the areas under Rai Bular. On the 3rd of the moon-lit half of April 1469 Tripta, Kalu's wife begot him a male child, who was named Nanak after his elder sister Nanki. She was so named as she had been born at the house of her Nana (grandfather on mother's side) in village Dera Chahal in Lahore district. This sister of Nanak was the first to observe some sort of divineness about her brother, that flared up all around when at the age of seven he astonished his teacher Pandit Gopal with his eloquence in explaining deeper truths about

man and God and composed an acnastic on Punjabi alphabet giving divinely inspired interpretation to each letter. He always spoke and sang of one God and his love for Him and being rich in music and melody he cast irresistible spell on all those who listened to him. It was here that at the age of nine he was called upon to put on the sacred thread according to the Hindu tradition by the family priest Hardyal which he refused to do saying that the thread could do him no good and would be burnt with the body on his death. If it was at all necessary to wear one let it be spun out of the cotton of Mercy and yarn of Harmony with twists and knots of truthful and temperate living. In fact he discarded all traditional rituals and caste and creed distinctions so scrupulously observed then. His was a God-inspired soul and his magnanimity made all that came into his contact magnanimous.

Rai Bhoi Ki Talwandi, his birth town, came to be known as Nanak-ayan (home of Nanak or Nankana after him and since then it has been called Nankana Sahib (Sahib being just Persian epithet of respect). Nankana

Sahib is a town of Gurdwaras (Sikh temples), the most important of these being the 'Nanak's Ayan' called Janam Asthan or Birth place of Nanak. It was earlier known as Kalu's Kotha (Room of Kalu). Pandit Gopal's school, where Nanak had his first lesson is at present known as Gurdwara Patti Sahib and is about 150 yards to the south east of Janam Asthan; and hardly 50 yards beyond that is Gurdwara Bal Lila, that commemorates the place where the boy Nanak enjoyed the company of his playmates and cast on them a spell with his novel games and sweet and melodious talks. In fact they felt a strange sort of light emanating from his eyes. These three Gurdwaras were originally got constructed by one Baba Gurbakhsh Singh under orders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when the latter visited the place on his return from Multan after its conquest in the year 1818-19.

Besides these there are three other Gurdwaras sacred to the memory of the boy Nanak. Two of these commemorate his having worked as a herdboyc to his father's cows. He would usually lead his cows to the

nearby pasture grounds where they would continue grazing. while Nanak sat under some shady trees absorbed in meditation. One day the cattle strayed into a neighbouring field and feasted on the luxuriant crop. Enraged beyond measure at his loss, the owner of the farm complained to Rai Bular chief of the place, who sent for Kalu and deputed a man to appraise the loss, but the appraiser's report on the loss was almost negligible.

On another day our herd-boy let loose his cattle for grazing in the meadow and himself fell sleep under a shady Mal tree. With the change of shade in the afternoon the hot sun rays fell on Nanak's face. A cobra appeared on the scene and shaded Nanak's face with its hood. By chance Rai Bular was passing that way, when he saw this. On his arrival there, the cobra disappeared but to his great surprise he found the boy alive. The Mal tree under which Nanak had slept stands to this day. A Gurdwara called Mal Sahib has been constructed here to commemorate the incident. It is about one kilometre to the east of Janam Asthan.

while the Gurdwara Kiara Sahib (Kiara means a field) is just at the place where the herd had damaged the crop and is situated four hundred yards further east.

There is another Gurdwara—Tamboo Sahib—(Tamboo means a tent) 380 yards to the east of Janam Asthan where stands a Mal tree which, with its branches, has covered, like a tent, the place beneath, it was under this tree that young Nanak took shelter when he returned from Chuharkana, whereto he had been sent by his father with some cash to make some profitable bargain. Nanak had spent the entire amount on feeding the hungry ascetics whom he had met on the way. When questioned he had replied that there could not be a more profitable bargain.

There is still another Gurdwara of Guru Hargobind, the 6th in line from Guru Nanak, This is in memory of the Guru having visited and stayed at this place while returning from the Kashmir valley about the year 1621-22. It is situated just near Tamboo Sahib to its east.

The whole of present town of Nankana

Sahib runs between Janam Asthan and Kiara Sahib a total length of almost two Kilometres with a width of half a kilometre only and the main centres of its population of about ten thousand are round about Gurdwaras Janam Asthan, Bal Lila and Mal Sahib. Before the Partition of India in 1947 Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were almost equally represented in the town, but since Partition it is entirely a Muslim town.

As Nanak grew up he did not feel at all interested in the worldly affairs. In order however to please his father, Nanak agreed to work as incharge of the provision stores of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodi of Sultanpur where his sister Nanaki lived with her husband Jai Ram. To divert his mind to the worldly pursuits Nanak was soon married to Sulakhni the daughter of Mool Chand of Batala. There after he lived a regular family life for some time at Sultanpur working all the time at the provision stores, which he lavishly distributed among the poor and needy. He used to take his early morning bath daily in the stream Vein, that flowed close by, and sit in deep meditation on its bank for hours

together, after which he started his day's work. One day he did not return after his bath, nor could he be traced any where and it was presumed that he had been drowned. But to every body's surprise he was seen at the end of the third day emerging out of the stream with the words, 'There is no Hindu and no Muslim' on his lips, which he repeated time and again. Thereafter he started the work, for which he felt he had been commissioned by God, and his first message to everyone was to obliterate all distinctions between man and man. That was what he meant by his oft repeated catch-phrase, 'There is no Hindu and no Muslim.' He was now no longer an employee of the Nawab & thence forth he set out as God's minstrel always harping on His name and calling upon everyone to sing His praises. He selected one Musalman bard-Mardana to play on rebec with him and started on his missionary tour. Bala a Hindu Jat (a land cultivator) with to testify his firm belief in the unity and universality of man. He had implicit faith in the unity and universality of God and man. His God is one Supreme Being, and a

single word that according to him could name God was 'Sat' i. e. Eternal, Truth. He defined Him as the only one creator, who pervades the entire creation. Having an unparalleled existence. He never entertains fear; nor enmity against anyone. His Being is not measured by time. He was never born and is self-radiant. Thus he did not believe in the incarnation of God nor in the existence of some Satan like Evil Being who could measure swords with Him.

Similarly to him all human beings were one. The same Supreme Soul pervades all of them. They had similar bodies and same temperaments. Human nature was the same everywhere and at all times. Hence all differences of caste creed, colour size, profession, wealth status and nationality were meaning less. In his eyes the so called lowest of the low were, as good as rather better than the self centered highest of the high. He however attached great importance to the development of one's innerself—the soul within the only criterion for that being the measure of truth and love inculcated in the soul so that the same should radiate from within &

diffuse all around. Whosoever came in contact with Nanak and on whomsoever his benign look fell, realized some 'celestial light' within himself and Nanak Dev came to be called and addressed by them as 'Guru' Nanak. 'Guru' is one who dispels ignorance. The disciples or followers of Guru Nanak came to be called Sikhs the term Sikh having the same connotation as Truth, that word in Pali meaning a person dedicated to & journeying towards Him. Their concept of Guru is also a little different. They believe that God's light that radiates from the Guru's person is in fact the Guru, but it does not necessarily pervade a mortal human body, God's light is in the 'Shabad' as they call it and the 'Shabad' is the Divine or the Revelation recorded in the God inspired Hymns. Hymns of Guru Nanak carefully preserved in the Holy book of the Sikhs thus form their unchangeable and everlasting Guru.

Donning the garb of fakir and accompanied by Mardana and Bala whom he called his brothers (Bhai Mardana and Bhai Bala Bhai means brother) Guru Nanak left Sultan-

pur Lodhi in 1497 and set on his first missionary tour that lasted for 12 years. He first halted at Saidpur, now known as Emenabad, near Lahore. There he stayed with a poor carpenter Lalo and partook of his very humble and simple food rejecting the choicest dishes of Malik Bhago—the chief of the town. On being asked as to why he was having his meals with the low-caste carpenter and not accepted his dainty hospitality, the Guru replied 'your food is illbegotten and smacks of the blood sucked of the poor, while milk oozes out of the honestly earned bread of Lalo. Humble but honest labourers are more welcome at my God's court than the high caste idle rich enjoying other's earnings.'

At Tulambha in the west Punjab he came across Sajjan, who was an assassin in a saintly garb. Sajjan is a Panjabi word for a friend. He had his eye on the Guru. The latter saw through the game and before going to sleep at night he sang a beautiful hymn in tune with the rebec played upon by Mardana. The hymn, as incorporated in the Holy Granth at Page 729, offered some very

wonderful similies to Sajjan which he at once realized. It began with the lines :

Bright sparkles the bronze

But when rubbed blackness comes from it.

The hymn had the devired effect and Sajjan turned a friend indeed.

At Hardwar he saw a multitude of people bathing in the Ganges and offering water to their dead ancestors by throwing it up towards the rising sun. The Guru began throwing water in the opposite direction. When asked he told the people that he was irrigating his crops at his village only 200 miles away. They laughed at him but the Guru replied if their handfuls of water could reach the sun why not his water on this very earth only 200 miles off. The people thus realized the futility of their offering water & other articles to their dead.

The Guru visited many places in Bihar, Bengal, Assam and other east India states more particularly the places of pilgrimage where he was likely to contact from far and near and disseminated his views on God and human life. He is said to have visited Burma

and gone as far as Indo-China in the east. He always took a rational view of things and disapproved all meaningless rituals and superstitions. (At the temple of Jagan Nath he saw the priests invoking blessing by performing the Arti ceremony. It was an offer of flowers, incense and pearl like things to their idol-god in a salver, wherein were also placed some lamps kindled with ghee instead of oil. The offer was made standing and singing in chorus together with cymbles and flutes but the Guru kept sitting while the ceremony was in progress. The priests called upon him to explain his conduct. The Guru's face gleamed in ecstasy and deep devotion as the following lines went forth from him in sweet melodious tune :-

The entire firmament is Thy salver, o Lord and the sun and the moon are the lamps therein, innumerable twinkling stars are the pearls and rubies set in thy salver.

The entire sandal and other woods emanating sweet smells are the incense at Thy door. O' Lord of Light the winds whisk over Thy Precious Head and the countless flowers borne by the whole forestry lie as offering at

at Thy feet. How wonderful, O' destroyer of all suffering, is this constanly held Arti of Thine and has sweet resounds incessently Thine Divine Music', Listening to the Guru the priests did realize that their Arti was just a mere shadow of what the Nature was holding to God every night and day.)

Guru Nanak returned home after twelve long year. His parents, sister, his wife, children, Rai Bular and all others, whom he met after so long, were happy with him. But he did not stay at Talwandi long and soon he set on his second missionary tour (1510 to 1515) on the Deccan side. This time he visited many a Budhi stic and Jain temple on his way and went as far as Ceylon where he met Raja Shivrabh of Sangla-deep (Ceylon).

His third tour (1516-18) took him to the north. Aat Monsarover he held dtscussions with sidhs the followers of Guru Gorakhnath who lived on alms in seclusion away from human habitations. Guru Nanak criticized them for their unhealthy escape from life rather than facing its problems. The Guru read to them a hymn, the essence whereof

was 'Abide-pure amid the impurities of the world,' During this sojourn the Guru is said to have crossed the himalayas and gone as far as Tibet,

Soon after his return from the North he attired himself in a Muslim Hajji's garb and left for Mecca, Unmindful of the position he lay in, at Mecca he slept with his feet towards the Kaaba. Enraged at this act of disrespect to the holy place, Jiwan, a Muslim pilgrim kicked the Guru saying 'what an infidel are you that sleep with your feet towards God' The Guru calmly replied 'please turn my feet in the direction where God is not' That was enough to awaken in them the sense of God's omnipresence. Thereafter they questioned the Guru as to who was better a Hindu or a Muslim and the prompt reply came 'God judges people by deeds and not by creeds'

(From Mecca Gru went to Baghdad in 1520 and in his talks with Pir Dastgir and other holies of the place he convinced them that there were not seven heavens and seven netherlands as he held by Muslims, but innumerable creations. notwithstanding whole-

sale condemnation of music by Muslims he made them realize the importance of sacred music in human life. The Guru held spiritual discussions with the one Behlol at Baghdad. The latter got so much enamoured of the Guru's divinity that he sat at the place where he had listened to the Guru for sixty long years after Guru's return from there.

The Guru returned to the Punjab in 1521 and once again went to meet Lalo at Saidpur. It was the time of Babar's invasion of India and on his way he had looted sacked and killed thousands of people there. Some of them were arrested and made to grind for the victorious armies. Guru Nanak and Mardana were among those called upon to grind corn. Guru Nanak bewailed the woes and miseries of the down-trodden people and poured out his heart in the deep anguish thus :

How strange is Thy dispensation, o Lord;

How incomprehensible are Thy ways !

All is dire confusion now.

But all happens as it pleases Him O Nanak

How can man resist His Will ?

He narrated what he saw at Saidpur in his pithy and extremely pathetic poems known as Babar-Vani occurring at page 417 of the Holy Granth. But the Guru accounts for all these sufferings and ruin thus :

When the Lord wishes to destroy one
He first destroys one's virtues'

Guru Nanak was now 52 and through his words and deeds he had been all the time, diffusing the celestial Light, he had been endowed with. He now settled at Kartarpur on the Ravi bank. T. L. Vaswani in his book 'A prophet of the people' writes at page 69, 'Work and worship, love and labour, silence and song blended together in the life at Kartarpur.' Here for 18 years the Guru gave practical demonstration of the truthful life which according to him was higher than truth itself. Here the people learnt with him 'how to live pure amidst the impurities of life'. In good and virtuous action lay the quintessence of a religion, he said :

'It is not words that saint or sinner make
It is action alone that is written in his book of fate, His practical life of meditation and

service and his thorough humbleness serve as beacon light to the world'.

In 1539 he chose one of his true devotees Bhai Lehna to be his successor and transmitting the light of the Guru into him, he named him Guru Angad i.e. Guru's limb or Guru's own self. A few days later he quietly passed into God's abode. There arose a controversy between the Hindus and the Muslims regarding the disposal of his earthly remains. The Hindus claimed that he was their Gnu, while Muslims called him their Pir and accordingly each party wanted to perform the last rites in its own way. That bears to the universality of his teachings and the love and respect they all had for him.

Guru Nanak last visited Talwandi, his birth place in 1510 when he went to see his parents there on return from his first missionary tour. Soon after he shifted his family and his old parents to Kartarpur a new town founded by himself on the Ravi bank upstream, over one hundred kilometres direct rout from Talwandi. Very little is known about Talwandi for over three centuries after that, except that Guru Arjan—the fifth of the Sikh

Gurus came here some time towards the close of the 16th century, when he gave location to the Kalu's Kotha, where Nanak was born and other places associated with his early life over there ; and again when Guru Hargobind the sixth in line came to pay his homage to the place in 1621-22. At the time these places were mere small raised platforms or at best small huts which were kept clean and lighted at night by some devotees of the Guru. Later a class of people called Pujaris or Mahants took up the work as their regular profession utilizing the offerings made at the places for their sustenance. The next historical reference to the place is in 1818-1819 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh after his conquest of Multan came here, ordered the construction of several memorial buildings called Gurdwaras and attached to these a large landed estate of about twenty thousand acres for their maintenance and for Guru ka Langar (Guru's free kitchen). This grant of land made the job of Mahants and Pujaris more lucrative and resulted in their firm hold of these.

The sanctity and un-assuming devotion noticed here earlier turned materialistic. The

Gurdwaras Janan Asthan & Mal Sahib were at this time in the hands of udasi seet. Bal Lila and Kiara Sahib were with Nirmal seet & Tambu Sahib and the Gurdwara of the 6th Guru were run by Nihangs. All of them but more particularly the udasis had Brahmanical propensities and in them they had installed the Hindu idol gods along with the Holy granth in Sahib.

With the advent of British rule in the Punjab and the running of irrigation canals in the Naukara Sahib area the agricultural income of the Mahants had gone very high up, and they began leading luxuriant and in some cases immoral lives, so much so that Narain Dass the Mahant of Janam Asthan had retained publically a muslim prostitute. It was also alleged that some pilgrim ladies had been maltreated in Janam Asthan. Besides some Mahants had sold off and even otherwise transferred the Gurdwara lands to their kith and kin.

This was the state of Gurdwara affairs all over the Punjab. The intelligentsia of the Sikhs assembling at Amritsar on the 15th Nov. 1920 constituted a committee to consider the Gurd-

wara problems on the whole. They decided to oust the Mahants and Pujaris from all the Gurdwaras and take the managements in their own hands, but the parties doing so were to remain strictly non-violent and in case of aggression from the Mahants or any other party they were to passively resist their attack,

Accordingly a party of about 130 Sikhs led by Bhai Lachhman Singh entered the Gurdwara Janam Asthan on the morning of the 20th Feb. 1921. The Mahant had hired some Pathans and others, who fired at and butchered the non-resisting Sikhs within the Gurdwara precincts & then collecting the dead as well as the wounded into various heaps and sprinkling oil burnt them all. The news spread like wild fire all over and another party of 2200 men led by Bhai Kartar Singh Jhabber arrived at Nankana Sahib on 21 afternoon. But meanwhile the Govt. had arrested Naraindass and cordoned Janam Asthan with a huge military force. Kartar Singh Jhabhar insisted on proceeding further, but the commissioner of Lahore Division on behalf of the Punjab Govt., handed over the premises of Janam Asthan to a committee of seven Sikhs headed

by Sardar Harbans Singh a descendant of General Sham Singh of Attari, the hero of the battle of Sabraon fought by the Sikhs against the British in 1846. Thus Janam Asthan passed into the hands of the Sikh community on the whole. The Mahants of the other five Gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib peacefully made over the control of their respective shrines to the Sikh committee, and some of them arrived at some settlement over regarding the properties held by them. But others remained adamant on that issue till the enforcement of the Punjab Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1926 under which a specially constituted Gurdwara Tribunal heard the claims & counter claims of the parties and barring four or five of about 50 property cases all were decided in favour of the committee. The total area of the estate including the non-agricultural land under the town of Nankana Sahib, various habitations of the Gurdwara tenants, approach roads irrigation Channels and the railway line comprising 17675 acres was declared to be originally Gurdwara property though some of it had been acquired by the government for public purposes. The actual agricultural area that finally passed into the hands of the Sikh

Community was about 15927 acres.

In 1926 a local Committee of Management of the Sikh Gurdwaras of Nankana Sahib was duly constituted under section 85 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act. It consisted of 13 members elected by the Sikhs of the districts Sheikhupura, Gujranwala, Lyallpur, Lahore and the town of Nankana Sahib and five nominated by the central Sikh Committee, known as Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee with its head office at Amritsar. An amendment made in the Act in 1943 placed the central committee in charge of these Gurdwaras retaining the Local Committee as a mere advisory body. The local Committee during its 17 years regime renovated some of the Gurdwara buildings, raised marble memorial within the Janam Asthan compound in honour of the Sikhs killed and burnt there in 1921. They have been included among the Sikh martyrs and their memory preserved in the daily set congregational prayer of the Sikhs. Besides, the Committee raised two high schools for boys and girls and a fine hospital and dispensary at Nankana Sahib and a Science and Technical college in

Bombay, a Sikh Missionary college at Amritsar and several schools in Meerutt, Moradabad and Balund Shaher districts of the U.P. Two Sikh Missions were also established and run at Hapur in U.P. and at Kangra in the Punjab.

An annual fair attended by about 150 thousand people was held at Nankana Sahib in November and another a smaller one on the 20th of February in memory of the martyrs of the day.

Since the Partition of India Nankana Sahib forms a Pakistan territory in the revenue records and as Pakistan was committed to be entirely a Muslim country, the Sikhs had to vacate it leaving the very birth place of theirs to be looked after by the Pakistan Govt. Nankana Sahib could then very well be given the status similar to that of the Vatican city, but neither the British rulers of India nor the major parties partitioning the country that is the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League bothered about it. The Sikhs being a very small minority and that too in the one state of the Punjab had but to rely on the good faith of both their governments. They have no doubt been

casually providing facilities to the Sikh pilgrims to visit Nankana Sahib on the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak but the Sikhs have neither the free access nor the option to manage and look after the proper performance of the Sikh ceremonies in the Gurdwaras. It is rather reported that the shrines including the Janam Asthan very often remain closed for months together.

It sits heavy on the Sikh hearts that the holy place, for free access to which they had spilled their blood and lost as many as one hundred & thirty valuable lives, still lie out of their reach. It is indeed very sad that the place wherefrom went off every morning and evening a call of mutual love and service to mankind should have been closed down and Sikhs not allowed free access nor performance of Sikh rites there. The Sikhs, though small in number, have required almost an international status and the formation of the Nankana Sahib Foundation comprising of the Sikh nationals of England, U.S.A. Canada, Iran, Japan and other East Asiatic and European countries with the object of securing through negotiations religious rights

of theirs to visit manage and run the Sikh temples in Pakistan bears to the intensity of feeling with which they look at the problem.

The impact of Guru Nanak's universal teachings on humanity in general, the roll of service that his followers have played in the world history more particularly in that of India, the significance of the Passive resistance displayed by them at Nankana Sahib and several other places in India and their status as a minority community in the world call for an international consideration and grant of purely religious rights to them.

